

WHAT DOES CLIMATE JUSTICE MEAN TO THE CJU JUSTICE LEAG?

The Climate Justice Union wanted a way for some of those most impacted by climate change, & the least heard of our community, to meaningfully contribute to the direction & content of our work for climate justice - So we created the Justice LEAG.

As the Justice LEAG have been yarning about climate justice for a while now, we were asked to develop a definition. Unsurprisingly, it was not an easy task - because climate justice and our lives are not always easily defined.

Some key themes did emerged from our conversation though:

1. Climate Justice is ensuring everyone has access to the basics such as shelter, water, food, healthcare, and safety during climate disasters and crises. (Guess what? This means they need access to these things before an extreme event too).
2. Climate Justice is privileging the perspectives, leadership, and self-determination of those most impacted by climate change and systemic inequities, including marginalised communities, the homeless, and low-income populations.
3. Climate justice addresses the systemic barriers and root causes that leave certain groups more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, rather than simply focusing on emission reduction, recycling or emergency responses to extreme events.
4. Climate justice forces us to redefining what a "disaster" is. We need to look beyond 'the physical and economic impacts to lives and livelihoods' to include the daily, ongoing crises experienced by those facing poverty, housing insecurity, and other forms of marginalisation.
5. Climate justice includes advocating for flexible, community-driven solutions and resources that empower people to support each other's immediate needs, rather than imposing top-down, bureaucratic processes.
6. Climate justice is a human rights issue that requires a decolonised holistic approach to tackling interconnected challenges like housing, racial justice, healthcare, and economic inequality.



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Very quickly we realised climate justice is a process not a product or outcome. It is not a fixed thing; it will depend on people, context, Country and situation.

Some key barriers to climate justice identified by the CJU Justice LEAG include:

1. Systemic inequities and marginalisation: We know that some people and communities, such as the homeless, low-income folk, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, are disproportionately impacted by climate change and disasters, yet their needs are often overlooked or ignored. Even without climate change impacts they face discrimination and prejudice and are denied their rights.
2. Narrow definitions and metrics: The traditional definitions and measurements of a "disaster" used by governments and institutions tend to focus on physical/economic impacts rather than the lived experiences and basic human needs of the people in the communities. Current measures also ignore entirely the impact on Culture and Country.
3. Lack of community engagement and leadership: There are significant structural barriers to ensuring the perspectives and solutions of frontline, impacted communities are centered in decision-making processes around climate justice. Time lines are insufficient, the wrong people are in leadership positions and those creating policy live very different lives to those who are poor, disabled, struggling and/or marginalised.



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4. Bureaucratic inertia and risk aversion: Government agencies and social service organisations are hesitant to take risks and be courageous (even when it is clear what needs to be done). Social service organisations are gagged from advocating for what is needed, and at times have partnerships with corporations who are causing the harms in the first place. And time and time again our State and Federal Governments cower at the threat of a media campaign or take the 'politically palatable' option - even when that is against the evidence and peoples need.

Overcoming these barriers will require a fundamental shift in power dynamics, prioritising community leadership, and bringing a decolonial, equity and justice frame to climate activities and social service organisations. Sustained advocacy, significant resourcing, collective leadership and community organising will be crucial.

